

“CHRISTIAN” SKEPTICS

Updated January 2, 2000 (first published December 2, 1999) (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, wayoflife.org, fbns@wayoflife.org) - The Bible warns that the church age will be characterized by increasing apostasy, or turning away from, the truth. Note the following Scriptures:

“And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. ... For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:11,24).

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29,30).

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Corinthians 11:3,4).

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:5).

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13).

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3,4).

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Peter 2:1,2).

“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4).

These Bible warnings refer not to conditions in the world, but to conditions among professing Christians; and this is exactly what we see today. One of the amazing fulfillments of these prophecies is the rapid increase of atheists and agnostics in various denominations. “Christian” skeptics! Of course, every Modernist or New Evangelical who denies that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, who questions the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, etc., is a skeptic. The word simply means one who doubts or questions generally accepted conclusions in religious matters. In this article, though, I am referring more specifically to actual atheists and agnostics who claim to be Christians. We can give many examples of this.

In 1968, a survey of 3,000 Protestant “clergymen” in AMERICA found that “a considerable number rejected altogether the idea of a personal God.” They replied that God was merely “the Ground of Being, “the Force of Life,” “the Principle of Love,” or the “Ultimate Reality” (Homer Duncan, *The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 31).

The EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA is filled with theological unbelief. An example is the misnamed book titled *Invitation to Faith* published in the 1980s by Lutheran theologian Paul Jersild. He wrote: “This does not mean, however, that we can conclude that God is a person who can be described in any objective sense” (p. 117).

There are many atheists and agnostics in the UNITARIAN-UNIVERSALIST DENOMINATION. The Unitarian and Universalist Association of Congregations in North America was formed in 1961 by a merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Churches in America. Unitarianism began in Europe about four hundred years ago as a denial of the God of the Bible, the Trinity, and the doctrine of the infallible inspiration of Scripture. As time passed, the Unitarian position has increasingly emphasized the right of professing Christians to believe whatever they wish, including complete disavowal of biblical truth. On the 30th anniversary of the merger, a survey was taken of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Luis Obispo, California. Members categorized themselves in this way: five were theist believers in one God, 29 were humanists, 27 were agnostics, 10 were atheists, and 10 said “frankly, I’m not sure” (Foundation magazine, Fundamental Evangelistic Association, Nov. 12, 1981).

A survey of students in the SOUTHERN BAPTIST SEMINARY in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1976 found that 35% of the Ph.D. and Th.M students HAD DOUBTS ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF GOD. The same percentage also had questions about whether Jesus Christ is “the Divine Son of God.” A full 60% said they were not sure that the miracles of the Bible took place as the Bible says they did (William A. Powell, Sr., “Liberalism Brews within the Southern Baptist Convention,” Fundamental Journal, February 1984, p. 21). (The conservative movement within the SBC has brought great change in the seminaries, and happily, the rank modernism has been removed from Southern Seminary in recent years.)

There are also atheists and agnostics among the UNITED METHODISTS. Charles Keysor founded the Good News Evangelical movement within the United Methodist denomination in 1961 in an attempt to stand against modernism. (He left the United Methodist Church in 1981.) In an article in Christianity Today in 1984, Keysor noted that the Gospel of Jesus Christ had not been central in the curriculum of the United Methodist Church for at least 50 years. He described the theological pluralism as “bewildering” and said that under pluralism “United Methodist clergy can hold almost any view--unless it is too strongly and explicitly orthodox and evangelical.” He reported: “In my first year of denominational seminary, one classmate wanted a Methodist pastorate SO HE COULD HELP PEOPLE GET RID OF THE SUPERSTITIOUS NOTION THAT THERE WAS A HIGHER POWER who restricts their freedom to be authentically human.”

An article in the March 19, 1975, issue of the Atlanta Constitution, described the apostate conditions in the United Methodist-affiliated Candler School of Theology. The article contained a firsthand report by K. Richard Robinson, a graduate student. One of his professors began every new class by saying, “Ladies and Gentlemen, I am an atheist.” Another professor told the students that anyone who had a fundamental belief in God could not get higher than a C minus in his class. Some of his professors accused him of being mentally ill because he believed in God (Harold Lindsell, The Battle for the Bible, p. 153).

In 1997, Episcopalian James Kelley published Skeptic in the House of God, describing skepticism among EPISCOPALIANS. HE ESTIMATED THAT 10% OF THE MEMBERS OF HIS PARISH ARE ATHEISTS OR AGNOSTICS. He said: “We love the incense, the stained-glass windows, the organ music, the vestments and all of that. It’s drama. It’s aesthetics. It’s the ritual. That’s neat stuff. I don’t want to give all that up, just because I don’t believe in God and all that” (Religion Today, June 9, 1997).

Episcopal Bishop John Spong of New Jersey (now retired) has gone to the outer limits in heretical theology. In his book Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism, Spong states, “Am I suggesting that these stories of the virgin birth are not literally true? The answer is a simple and direct ‘Yes.’ Of course these narratives are not literally true. Stars do not wander, angels do not sing, virgins do not give birth, magi do not travel to a distant land to present gifts to a baby, and shepherds do not go in search of a newborn savior.” Spong stated in his diocesan newspaper, The Voice, that Darwin’s evolutionary theory has “destroyed forever the power of the traditional Christian

myth" (Ecumenical News Service, Dec. 6, 1996). SPONG SAID THAT ONE COULD BE A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT BEING A THEIST because the image of God in the Bible "is no longer operative." Speaking at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., (the church attended by President Bill Clinton) in December 1995, Spong denied that the Old Testament contains prophecies of Jesus Christ, said the resurrection and virgin birth of Christ did not literally happen, claimed that Jesus' earthly father Joseph was a fictional character created by the early churches, denounced the Ten Commandments as "immoral" because they "define women as property, and called the Apostle Paul "a self-hating gay man" (Advent/Christmas Pro Fide, December 1995).

In 1985, the St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis ran an advertising campaign that included this slogan: "The Episcopal Church welcomes you. Regardless of race, creed, color or the number of times you've been born." Twenty Episcopal churches in the Memphis, Tennessee, area ran an advertisement which stated, "In an atmosphere of absolute right and wrongs, here's a little room to breathe. ... the Episcopal Church is totally committed to the preservation of open dialogue and undogmatic faith. We exist to tell the world about a God who loves us regardless of what we've done or what we believe. EVEN IF WE DO NOT BELIEVE IN HIM, he believes in us. We do not suffocate with absolutes."

Professor Dorothee Solle, a GERMAN LUTHERAN professor of Systematic Theology who has taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York, was one of the main speakers at the 1983 Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, British Columbia. She denounced the biblical concept of God. Peter Beyerhaus of the International Christian Network reported: "This Assembly was the first in the history of the Ecumenical Movement where A THEOLOGICAL ATHEIST -- Dorothee Soelle -- and leading representatives of non-Christian religions were invited to address the audience on its central theme Jesus Christ -- the Life of the World" (Christian News, February 4, 1985, p. 2).

Though some 85 percent of the people in the UNITED KINGDOM nominally profess to be Christian, a Harris Research Centre poll in 1984 found that only one in two people in Britain believe there is a God.

Earlier this year, British Broadcasting Corporation reported that that there are vicars in the CHURCH OF ENGLAND who do not believe in God (BBC, "Vicars who don't believe in God," July 13, 1999). Some of these are members of the Sea of Faith, an organization in the United Kingdom that claims that religion is a "human creation." Some of the members also claim that God is a man-made myth. According to a Sea of Faith spokesman, ROUGHLY 50 ANGLICAN VICARS ARE MEMBERS OF THE ORGANIZATION, ALONG WITH SOME CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND MEMBERS OF OTHER DENOMINATIONS and non-Christian religions. One of the Anglicans who do not believe in God is Ronald Pearse, a retired priest. He said religion is people's attempt to "try to reach an understanding of themselves, the universe and maybe God, if God is a relevant word to them individually."

The Church of England is literally filled with unbelief and apostasy of the most vicious sort. While traveling through London in 1982, I picked up a copy of a newspaper containing an interview by John Mortiner of the Sunday Times with then Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie. It was Easter, and the interviewer asked Runcie if he understood why Christ had to suffer. The Archbishop replied, "AS TO THAT I AM AN AGNOSTIC." He did not know for certain why Christ died on the cross! The interviewer asked, "Is God a judge?" Runcie replied, "No." The interviewer then said, "So you don't see God as celestial Lord Chief Justice?" Runcie said, "Not at all. I had an old landlady when we were at Oxford. And when we got into any sort of trouble, she'd say: 'There's one above who seeth all.' I can't think of God like that." Mortiner then asked Runcie if God accepts people of other religions, and Runcie had this reply: "I can't believe in a God who only

saves people who live in certain latitudes. I used to lecture to Hellenic cruises about [Islamic] mosques, and I found great spiritual values in them.”

A religious survey in 1992 found that 80 percent of DENMARK’S LUTHERANS DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION, whereas 14 percent believe in reincarnation. Among young people aged 18-30 years old, 18 percent believe in reincarnation and only 15 percent in resurrection (Christian News, Oct. 4, 1993).

In a 1984 interview with Swedish journalist Elizabeth Frankl, Krister Stendahl, who was being ordained as the Bishop of Stockholm and the archbishop of the CHURCH OF SWEDEN (Lutheran), stated that “to hold to a belief in just one God is idolatry” and that “one can pray to God as energy.” When asked directly if he believes in God, Stendahl replied:

“I THINK I’VE RISEN ABOVE MATTERS OF FAITH AND DOUBT. ... I REALLY DON’T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO ASK WHETHER ‘THERE IS’ A GOD. I believe instead that we have to find a place for ourselves and then live in the real world. But I’ve fought a long war about all these matters and can’t go into such questions here. ... It’s not that one position is right and the other is wrong” (“Krister Stendahl maintains heretical views on eve of consecration as Bishop of Stockholm,” *Christian News*, November 19, 1984, p. 1).

The journalist then asked Stendahl what lies beyond death:

“Oh, I’d imagine that it would be great if we could find a really fine heavenly paradise to wander around in. But I know how childish such human dreams are. I don’t live for dreams” (Krister Stendahl, *ibid.*).

CONCLUSION

The hour is very late, my friends. We rejoice to testify that Krister Stendahl, John Spong, Dorothee Solle, and all other “Christian” skeptics are wrong. There is a Heaven and there is a Hell, just as the Bible says. There is also the Gift of Salvation whereby a repentant, believing sinner can be born again through faith in the cross of Jesus Christ.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:3,9-17).